

Press Releases

1. October 4, 2002

Paro, Bhutan: The four-day international gathering of mountain women — Celebrating Mountain Women (CMW) — ended today with the adoption of the Thimphu Declaration. The declaration will be taken to the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit to be held later this month. The four-day conference was organised by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), and The Mountain Forum. CMW is one of the events planned for the International Year of Mountains declared by the United Nations in 2002.

CMW, the first-ever global gathering of mountain women, had 250 participants from 35 countries. Over the four days, the participants discussed a wide range of issues concerning women in mountainous regions. The five main themes, which were taken up for in-depth discussion, were:

1. Natural Resources and Environment
2. Health and Well-being
3. Entrepreneurship
4. Legal, Political and Human Rights
5. Culture and Indigenous Knowledge

Gender was a cross-cutting theme. The outcome of these discussions served as important inputs for the Thimphu Declaration.

The Prime Minister of Bhutan, H.E. Lyonpo Dr. Kinzang Dorji, inaugurated the conference on 1st October. The Prime Minister stressed the importance of mountains, which, he said, are home to one-tenth of the world's population, and are sources of diversity, minerals, and forests. He said that more than 3 billion people rely on mountains for water — to grow food, produce electricity and sustain industries — and, most importantly, to drink. Mrs. Irene Santiago, an internationally-reputed development expert and women's activist, delivered the keynote address. The Director General of

ICIMOD, Dr. J. Gabriel Campbell, said at the inaugural function that this was the first time mountain women were coming together to chart a future course of action to make their lives better. Even as the world's attention is focused on mountains this year, women who are the backbone of mountain livelihoods, "are rarely heard, rarely govern, rarely seen for what they are, too often not allowed to grow, learn and energise their search for a better future."

At the end of their deliberations on Thursday, the delegates also drew up strategies to build on the process initiated at CMW. As a follow-up, it was suggested this dialogue be continued through meetings at various levels, ranging from grassroots to global, to enable women to form strong collectives. It was felt that the creation of networks and partnerships would help them share information, success stories, and other experiences.

In addition to the discussions, several other activities were organised. These included a film festival on mountain women (featuring documentaries from different parts of the world), and tents and stalls displaying special products from mountain regions. The highlight of these parallel activities was a colourful costume show featuring the attire of mountain women and men from over 20 countries.

2. October 3rd 2002

Paro, Bhutan: A crystallisation of concerns took place here today on the third day of the Celebrating Mountain Women (CMW) conference, with the submission of the recommendations of the five working groups to the plenary. These recommendations will be inputs into the Thimphu Declaration that is to be adopted tomorrow.

The plenary also discussed strategies to build on the process initiated at CMW, the first international

gathering of mountain women. As a follow-up, it was suggested that this dialogue be continued through meetings at various levels ranging from grassroots to global, in order to enable women to form strong collectives. It was felt that the creation of networks and partnerships would help them share information, success stories and other experiences.

The working groups had intensive discussions over one-and-a-half days and looked at challenges, research gaps, and possible solutions to the issues facing mountain women all over the world. The five themes were:

1. Natural Resources and Environment
2. Health and Well-being
3. Entrepreneurship
4. Legal, Political, and Human Rights
5. Culture and Indigenous Knowledge

The group on Health and Well-being identified 14 priority health issues for mountain women, including reproductive health, increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS, limited accessibility and affordability of quality health care, inadequate government policies and allocations in the health sector, and lack of education, information, and communication. The group provided recommendations for policies, programmes, networking, and research for the next five years.

The recommendations included:

- Lobbying for increased budgetary allocation for the health needs of mountain women and their families,
- Incorporation of gender perspectives and local knowledge into public policy,
- Collective mobilisation of resources and policy analysis, and
- Advocacy to address the reproductive and sexual health and rights of mountain women.

On the programmatic level, the group recommended:

- Framing of strategies for male involvement,
- Incorporation of gender and community issues, and
- Innovative approaches such as health micro-insurance schemes.

Research gaps identified included lack of disaggregated data and the need to examine the HIV/AIDS situation in the mountains.

The group on Entrepreneurship made the following recommendations:

- Create training tools adapted to the needs of mountain women, such as managerial skills, product development skills, market intelligence, and financial and accounting skills,
- Create the necessary infrastructure to enable income generation and entrepreneurship skills,
- Raise awareness among mountain women about the uniqueness of their knowledge and the need to protect it as well as market their products,

- Develop relationships with trading partners through specialised trade platforms and mountain support groups, and finally,
- Increase mountain women's access to capital.

The group on Culture and Indigenous Knowledge identified globalisation as one of the biggest influences on mountain culture and felt that traditional knowledge had been undermined in the last few decades. The group recommended support for documentation and research on indigenous cultures, religions, and knowledge systems, especially those involving women, who are the custodians of memory. Other suggestions included:

- Integration of indigenous knowledge systems into all levels of education, and involving indigenous women as teachers and trainers,
- Participation of governments, NGOs, public and private bodies, and women's groups in the creation of training programmes for empowerment,
- Establishing a network of mountain women,
- Programmes for capacity building, and
- Developing educational programmes to raise awareness of harmful cultural practices.

Taking note of the fact that mountain women do not have a say in decision-making processes, the group on Political, Legal, and Human Rights recommended a one-third reservation for mountain women in decision-making bodies at the state and traditional levels. It further suggested the formation of mountain women committees and gender sensitisation programmes for governments, academia, the private sector, institutions, and law enforcement agencies. Mountain-specific policies and laws based on mountain women's needs should be prepared in a decentralised and participatory manner, the group said.

The group took special note of the impact of armed conflict on women and recommended a situation analysis on this. Women should be trained and appointed as peace builders for conflict resolution, it suggested.

The group on Natural Resources and Environment identified several research gaps. For instance, more needs to be done towards knowledge sharing on alternative technologies and best practices, it was felt.

Research on how changes in social and ecological environments have affected women needs to be documented, as well as problems that have arisen due to the conflict between conventional and traditional natural resource management systems.

The group recommended that alternative, flexible, and context-specific learning systems are included in the formal education system. The impact of increasing privatisation of resources in mountain regions (particularly on women) needs to be recognised and mitigated, the group said.

3. October 2nd 2002

Paro, Bhutan: The second day of Celebrating Mountain Women (CMW), an international gathering of people from the mountainous regions of 35 countries, was devoted to in-depth discussions on five main themes:

1. Natural Resources and Environment
2. Health and Well-being
3. Entrepreneurship
4. Legal, Political, and Human Rights
5. Culture and Indigenous Knowledge

ICIMOD and the Mountain Forum organised the four-day conference. Delegates broke up into small groups to deliberate on each of these themes. The recommendations from these groups will be presented at the plenary on Thursday and serve as important inputs for the Thimphu Declaration.

Natural Resources and Environment: Speakers in this group highlighted the fact that women are the primary resource managers in mountain regions, with an intimate knowledge of their complex environments. Their problems have been compounded in recent years by environmental degradation and poor resource management, and increased migration of men to the plains.

A paper by Yu Xiaogang looked at “Gender Relations, Livelihoods and Supply of Eco-system Service: a Study of Lashi Watershed in China”. Vinay Tandon’s paper focused on sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh in India. A paper on “Gender and Management of Mountain Resources in Africa — A Participatory Approach” by Esther L. Nijiro was also discussed.

Legal, Political, and Human Rights: The majority of mountain women do not enjoy the same legal, political, and human rights as men and therefore lag behind in education, health, and public participation.

Women in mountainous areas have little knowledge of their rights and the enormous demands on their time makes it difficult for them to be involved in the public sphere or in any decision-making processes. A paper presented by Renee Giovarelli focused on women’s rights to land in the Kyrgyz Republic. Two other papers, “Gender-Asset Gap: Land in Latin America” by Magdalena Leon and, “Patterns and Trends of Women’s Participation in Land Markets in Uganda” by Abby Sebina-Zziwa also dealt with the issue of land ownership. The group identified other concerns such as reproductive rights, education, and economic, social, and cultural rights. Women’s lack of participation in the political arena was another concern. Speaking of legal rights, a question was raised about whether existing laws actually protected the above-mentioned rights. The role of women in conflict resolution was also discussed.

Health and Well-being: Living in remote and rough terrain where food is more difficult to grow, workloads are heavy, and access to health care is poor, has impacted heavily on the health status of women living in mountain regions. In addition, the

high degree of male migration and armed conflict has further affected women’s health, which is already under stress due to excessive and early childbearing as well as malnutrition. Lack of clean drinking water, and poor sanitary conditions in the house result in a high incidence of disease.

The group felt that despite variations from region to region, the basic problems of mountain women are not very different. A paper on “Health and Well-being of Women in the Asia-Pacific Region” by Ritu Bhatia cited the example of Nepal, where 80 per cent of women of child-bearing age are anaemic and suffer from iron and protein deficiencies; similarly in Myanmar, mountain women have no access to basic health, education, and social services compared to other women in the country.

Farah Usmani’s paper, ‘Afghanistan Country Profile: Reproductive Health’ presented a detailed account of how years of conflict have affected the health of women there. Although there is a lack of sufficient data, there is clear evidence of high rates of maternal morbidity and mortality. Further, malnutrition, frequent pregnancies without basic care or trained medical help, and lack of access to information or services all contribute to the poor health of women in Afghanistan. Xhi Xhi Xhenis’s paper gave an account of “Old Laws and Morals in the Beautiful Mountains of Albania”.

Culture and Indigenous Knowledge: The group focused on the rich culture and indigenous knowledge base of mountain people that development policies and programmes have largely ignored. It was felt that in this fast-changing world, the rich tradition of oral history, songs, myths, and legends were being lost. However, women, being the custodians of traditional knowledge, could help preserve their unique culture.

Michela Zucca, in her paper on “Women of the Mountains: from Silence to Recognition” spoke of the vital role women could play in the future of the Alps and the Alpine micro-economy. Angela Castellanos’s paper on “Gender Roles in Colombian Mountain Areas” concluded that women make an outstanding contribution to preserving culture. Further, due to an increase in poverty in highland areas, women have turned traditional handicrafts into a remunerative activity and, in the process, have preserved local culture.

Entrepreneurship: Participants in this group fell into five broad categories — those in the tourism industry, researchers, entrepreneurs, policy makers, and development workers. The day’s discussion was broadly divided into the presentation of the three lead papers, exchange of experiences, and finally, challenges and needs, such as for research into various aspects of entrepreneurial activities.

A paper from Slovenia by Patricia Verbole looked at a study of women entrepreneurs and policies and practices in that country. It concluded that there was a need for women entrepreneurs’ networks, as well as for the provision of information on financing and so on from local advisory boards. Another paper,

edited by Phuntshok Tshering, dealt with the “Development of a Strategy for the Promotion of Mountain Women’s Entrepreneurship”. Elaine Marshall and Kate Schreckenbergs’ paper on “Women, Forests and Markets: Researching Poverty Alleviation through Commercialisation of Forest Resources in Mexico and Bolivia” examined parameters to gauge which natural forest products could be successfully commercialised in terms of yield, perishability, and availability.

4. October 1st 2002

Paro, Bhutan: Celebrating Mountain Women (CMW), an international gathering of women from mountainous regions in 35 countries, got off to a colourful and ceremonial start here today. CMW is one of the events planned for the International Year of Mountains declared by the United Nations in 2002.

The four-day event will take up five broad theme areas for discussion:

1. Natural Resources and Environment
2. Health and Well-being
3. Entrepreneurship
4. Legal, Political, and Human Rights
5. Culture and Indigenous Knowledge

Gender will be a cross-cutting theme. The CMW event will conclude with the adoption of the Thimphu Declaration on October 4. The issues and concerns highlighted at CMW will be taken to the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit in Kyrgyzstan later this month.

Inaugurating the conference, H.E. Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji, the Prime Minister of Bhutan, stressed the importance of mountains, which, he said, are home to one-tenth of the world’s population, and are a source of diversity, minerals and forests. He said that more than three billion people rely on mountains for water to grow food, produce electricity, and sustain industries — and, most importantly, to drink.

It was very apt that the event was being held in Bhutan, he said, as it was an entirely mountainous country. He explained that the Bhutan government’s policies were aimed at conservation and sustainable development to overcome challenges due to physical terrain, remoteness, lack of infrastructure, capital and so on. The ultimate goal of all the government’s social and development policies is to achieve ‘Gross National Happiness’ he said.

Referring to women, the Prime Minister said that although life in the mountains was hard, it was harder for women. However, women were not helpless: “There are many cases where women have transformed their communities by their vision and social consciousness. They have made the environment a better place to live in, brought people together and served as an example to others.”

The involvement of women was integral to the success of policies related to the sustainable development of mountain regions, he added. Emphasising the important role played by women

living in mountains, the Prime Minister said they were often guardians of agricultural biodiversity and knew more than men about plant varieties as well as options for food preparation. The issues that the CMW event needed to address over these four days were to see how this knowledge could be preserved, passed on, and shared by other mountain communities; and how to tap the potential of these women while carrying the men along.

Delivering the keynote address, Ms. Irene Santiago, international development expert and an eminent women’s activist, said that the obstacles to women’s development, identified at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, remained, even seven years later. In fact, forces such as conservatism, globalisation, the breakdown of political systems and alliances, and the homogenisation of culture, and media and communications had “further intensified and widened.”

She hoped that CMW would create strategies to make mountain women visible and “bring them out of the shadows and into the sunlight of power.” Drawing on her extensive experience and involvement in various international conferences on women, Ms. Santiago extended a few words of advice to the delegates who will be deliberating on the special problems and needs of mountain women. She urged them to create public consciousness, express their demands, and move ahead to create spaces in political fora.

Underlining the fact that that inequality and gender underdevelopment is about power, she pointed out that all issues concerning women — land tenure, work load, health, environment, and rights — are problems about power and powerlessness. She therefore urged women to redefine power. “Power is the potency to act for the good,” she said, exhorting women to shed their resistance to claiming power in order to make the world “less brutish, less dangerous, less un-giving, less unreasonable.”

Speaking earlier, Director General of the International Centre for the Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Dr. Gabriel Campbell, observed that it was the first time that mountain women were coming together to chart a future course of action to make their lives better. Even as the world’s attention is focused on mountains this year, women who are the backbone of mountain livelihoods “are rarely heard, rarely govern, rarely seen for what they are, too often not allowed to grow, learn and energise their search for a better future,” he added.

In mountainous regions throughout the world, it is the women who are the main farmers, who select and sow the seeds, harvest, take care of livestock and care for forests. Yet, he said, they rarely own any land, obtain or control cash from market sales, receive information on technology or markets, or make policy decisions that affect their lives.

Referring to a study conducted in Nepal, he said mountain women work longer hours than men —

eleven hours of productive labour compared to seven hours by men — but do not reap the benefits.

Dr. Campbell said the four-day deliberations would be aimed at charting a course of future action, building networks for solidarity, and strengthening mountain women's rights to resources and influencing public affairs.

Ms. Chandni Joshi, Regional Director of UNIFEM, said CMW provided a platform for mountain women's voices and concerns, which had so far been absent from the development discourse. "Women know what they need — they need space and opportunity for equal participation like the one provided here," she said. Women all over, she said, faced barriers to their advancement but mountain women faced additional challenges like rough terrain, climate, limited access, and migration of men.

Others who spoke included representatives of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the Austrian Coordination Bureau and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), which is the UN's lead agency for the International Year of Mountains.

5. September 30th 2002: Countdown to the Conference

Paro, Bhutan: The Royal Bhutan Government places a great deal of importance on the welfare and development of its people in this mountainous country, according to the Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Chairperson of the National IYM (International Year of Mountains) Committee, Dasho Sangay Thinley.

Addressing a press conference here on the eve of the four-day international conference, Celebrating Mountain Women (CMW), Dasho Thinley welcomed media persons who have come from many countries and said that Bhutan was happy to host such an event. Delegates from as many as 34 countries are attending the conference, which begins on October 1.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and the Mountain Forum have organised CMW. Dr. Gabriel Campbell, Director General of ICIMOD, said CMW was "a truly unique and creative effort to focus on issues being faced by women in the mountainous areas and also to celebrate their contribution."

2002 having been declared the Year of Mountains by the United Nations, ICIMOD had been working through the year in various fora on the issue. The main points emerging from CMW will be taken up for discussion at the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit to be held in Kyrgyzstan, later in October.

The contribution of women in the mountains is frequently overlooked, Dr. Campbell noted, "even though they are at the centre of the economy and the life in the mountains." In fact, the 'real' mountain farmers are women, he said. A detailed survey in Nepal had shown that mountain women spend

eleven hours a day in the farm and household whereas men spend only seven hours. "One of the biggest challenges of this meeting is to make heard the unheard and make visible the invisible," he observed.

Ms. Chandni Joshi, Regional Director of UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), described CMW as a 'special event' for UNIFEM, which is one of the sponsors. And there could not have been a better place to host it than Bhutan, she added. Ms. Joshi emphasised that this was the first time in the world that mountain women were coming together to discuss issues concerning them. Men and women from across the globe have come to celebrate and deliberate on gender justice, she said.

Ms. Joshi also expressed the hope that at the end of CMW, concrete plans would emerge that would directly impact and empower mountain women at the grassroots.

The CEO of The Mountain Institute, Ms. Catherine Cooke, said that unlike women living in the plains, mountain women do not have access to networks and other fora. One of the challenges at CMW was the formation of more networks — nationally, regionally and internationally — to empower mountain women and enable their voices to be heard. Finally, all the speakers expressed their thanks to the Royal Bhutan Government for hosting such a unique global gathering.

6. Pre-conference

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and the Mountain Forum are organising an international gathering, "Celebrating Mountain Women", as part of the activities under the United Nations-sponsored International Year of Mountains (IYM) in 2002. This global gathering will be held in Bhutan from October 1-4, 2002.

The Honorable Prime Minister of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonpo Dr. Kinzang Dorji, will inaugurate CMW. Irene Santiago (internationally known development expert) will deliver the keynote address; Catherine N. Cooke (President and CEO of The Mountain Institute) will give the valedictory address. The conference will end with the adoption of the Thimphu Declaration.

This first-of-its-kind global celebration of mountain women will focus on empowerment through innovation and entrepreneurship. It is unique in that it will facilitate face-to-face interaction of various actors in the development sector who do not normally come together. This is an occasion to draw the world's attention to the realities of life in the mountains. Additionally, it will provide a platform for mountain women to articulate their concerns, and share experiences and ideas related to the future of mountain livelihoods and cultures.

The conference will bring together approximately 200 people, including:

- Representatives of mountain women's formal and informal groups

- Indigenous mountain women
- Key academics/resource persons from different mountain regions
- Entrepreneurs
- Elected political leaders
- Media representatives
- Policy makers and planners
- Donors
- NGO representatives

The five theme areas are:

1. Natural Resources and Environment
2. Health and Well-being
3. Entrepreneurship
4. Legal, Political, and Human Rights
5. Culture and Indigenous Knowledge

These will be highlighted in the framework of research, policy, practices through various presentations, songs, stories, theatre, and videos. A cross-cutting theme will be gender roles and responsibilities. Various development players will come together to share the problems and progress of mountain women. Most importantly, the meeting will be a 'pinnacle' event in a process in which mountain women's networks will grow, strengthen, and contribute to more sensitive policies and practices that empower mountain women and communities in innovative ways. The two most compelling movements in the last century — women and environment — have been reflected in the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW). Both conferences highlighted the diverse needs of these movements and the failure of planned development to meet them. They stressed the need for research, analysis, and experience that examined policies and programmes through a gender lens, which would ensure empowerment of women and communities and, thereby, attain sustainable development.

Women living in the mountain regions of the world make a major contribution to the economy. They are the main producers of food crops and managers of common property resources, with principal responsibility for assuring food security. They have access to and control an enormous store of indigenous knowledge and wisdom. Despite this, there are multiple biases working against women as is evident in the institutions, policies, and processes of development. Women have little or no participation in policy planning and implementation that would meet their needs. Therefore, despite their predominant role in the primary sectors of economic development, mountain women today continue to be marginalised, with limited access to public and private services. To counter these trends, the experiences and perspectives of mountain women need to be heard, and their capacity for economic and social contributions to the community recognised and strengthened.

The international gathering in Bhutan will be a forum for the voices of mountain women. The programme

contains activities in preparation for the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit to be held in Kyrgyzstan from October 29 to November 1, 2002. The planned activities will put mountain women centre-stage; and mainstream their reality into the IYM discussions, thus enabling a major paradigm shift.

7. November 8th 2001

Mountain women are preparing to voice global solidarity at an international gathering that will be held here in Kathmandu in May 2002, bringing together almost 200 participants, including mountain women, NGOs, mountain entrepreneurs, researchers, senior government officials, funding agencies, and media representatives. Participants from approximately 65 countries, representing the world's major mountain ranges, especially the marginalised communities, are expected to attend.

The focus of the CMW event in May 2002 will be to show the strength and commitment of mountain women in making a positive contribution to local and national economies. Towards this end, discussions, activities, and events will highlight and showcase practical aspects of mountain life — their stories, songs, dances, foods, crafts, textiles, traditional knowledge, and efforts to make constructive change.

The meeting will also address issues of concern such as legal and political rights, health and well-being, conservation of traditional wisdom and natural resources, women's labour and opportunities for entrepreneurship.

This first-of-its-kind global celebration of mountain women will focus on empowerment through innovation and entrepreneurship. It is unique in that it will facilitate face-to-face interaction of various actors in the development sector that do not normally come together. The planned activities will put mountain women centre-stage, mainstream their reality into the IYM discussions and Rio+10, and enable a major paradigm shift.

Mountains were placed on the international agenda at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro; and the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing called for special attention to mountain women.

8. May 11th 2001

Kathmandu, Nepal: Twenty women from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin and North America concluded a three-day meeting during which they finalised a plan of action for a mountain women's agenda.

The meeting proposes an international gathering in May 2002 to be held in Kathmandu, bringing together almost 300 participants, including mountain women, NGOs, mountain entrepreneurs, researchers, parliamentarians, senior government officials, funding agencies, and media representatives.

Participants from approximately 70 countries representing the world's major mountain ranges, especially the marginalised communities, are expected to attend.

The focus of the meeting will be to show the strength and commitment of mountain women in making a positive contribution to local and national economies. Towards this end, discussions, activities, and events will highlight and showcase practical aspects of mountain life — their stories, songs, dances, foods, crafts, textiles, traditional knowledge, and efforts to make constructive change.

The meeting will also address issues of concern, such as legal and political rights, health and well-being, conservation of traditional wisdom and natural resources, and women's labour and opportunities for entrepreneurship.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development and the Mountain Forum are organising the May 2002 event, planned as a part of the UN-declared International Year of Mountains. The decision to hold this event was made at a meeting of the Mountain Forum Council in Cusco, Peru in 2000.

As a forerunner to the May meeting, a curtain-raiser is being planned on March 8, International Women's Day.

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